



... boating the Smith is  
described as floating on air. . .



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**PETS** are welcome in the NRA, but they must be kept under control at all times. Keeping your pet on a leash helps protect your pet, vegetation, wildlife, and other visitors. Pets must be on leash in developed campgrounds. Clean up after all pets, dispose of waste properly and be considerate of other visitors to the NRA.

**BEARS:** Although most large mammals avoid anything smelling like humans, bears are an exception. The simple rule is: stay away from bears and DO NOT harass them.

If bears are a problem, hang all food, toothpaste, etc., from a tree at least eight feet from the ground and four feet from the trunk. Set your camp up at a reasonable distance from the food,

and allow absolutely NO FOOD in the tent; a tent will not stop a bear!

## WEATHER

Weather in the Smith River NRA is very changeable. Temperatures in the winter may drop into the 30s and 40s with occasional snow. The rainy season normally runs from October through April with an average annual rainfall of 92.55 inches. Summers are dry, with 80° to 100° temperatures. For current weather information, call the Smith River NRA.

## A BRIEF RIVER HISTORY

A river can mean many things to people: a navigation route, drinking water, food, even a source of beauty and inspiration. The Smith River has always been a stream abounding in fish and pure water, and through wise use and careful management, this will continue to be true for years to come. But historically, the waters of the Smith were not a major travel or supply route from the ocean into the interior of northern California, although numerous trails paralleled its shores. While winter whitewater currents quickly carry watercraft downstream to the ocean, these routes may be unnavigable for the remainder of the year. Except for a stretch of the main stem from the ocean to the Middle-South Fork confluence, the Smith River is, for the most part, a one-way street.

At least 600 years ago, the Tolowa people thrived along the Smith River. It is estimated that their population numbered from 1,000 to 2,000 people. They lived mainly near the river's mouth, but they also ventured upstream seasonally and gathered acorns and other foods. One of many places where the Tolowa people



A Tolowa dugout canoe on the Smith River

Del Norte County Historical Society  
Photograph

fished for salmon was at the confluence of Mill Creek and the Smith (called *tsahu me*), a spot that was also a good source of acorns. Another village, *mus-yeh-sait-neh*, stood about two miles down-river from the current Smith River NRA Visitor Center. They built rectangular-shaped wood or stone houses partially into the ground and these provided suitable shelter in the wet, coastal environment.

In June 1828, fur trapper Jedediah Smith and his party from the Ashley fur-trading venture crossed the river, which was later named for him, and camped at the head of Myrtle Creek. They were probably the first white men to enter the Smith River basin, arriving via an overland route. They explored the redwood coast, looking for a better route between the Rockies and the Pacific.

"Gold Fever" brought hundreds of miners to the area in the 1850s, along with farmers and all the other business people needed to sustain this intense migration. Miners sought and found gold in the forks and streams of the Smith River, and when placers (mineral deposits) diminished, many miners used water from the river in hydraulic mining operations. Hydraulic mining was quite destructive to the land, washing away river banks and entire terraces. Signs of this style of mining still exist in remains of ditches and flumes built to contain the water, and in the environmental effects on the Smith River watershed.

In 1907 most of the Smith River basin was included in the Klamath Reserve, the precursor to the Klamath National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service, (Gasquet Ranger District) managed the land and water "for the greatest good of the resource for the greatest number of people." This was an event of major significance to the environmental well-being of the Smith River watershed. In 1947 the newly created Six Rivers National Forest took over management of the Gasquet Ranger District, which in 1990 became the Smith River National Recreation Area.

## SCALE OF RIVER DIFFICULTY

The following classification is based on a guide for rivers established by the American Whitewater Affiliation. The river should be considered one class more difficult than normal if the water temperature is below 50° Fahrenheit, or the trip is in a wilderness.

### Class I Easy

Fast-moving water with riffles and small waves. Few obstructions, all obvious and easily avoided by paddlers with little training. Risk to swimmers is slight; self-rescue is easy.

### Class II Novice

Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels, which are evident without scouting. Occasional maneuvering may be required, but rocks and medium-size waves are avoided easily by trained paddlers. Swimmers are seldom injured, and group assistance, while helpful, is seldom needed.

### Class III Intermediate

Rapids with moderate, irregular waves, which may be difficult to avoid and which can swamp an open canoe. Complex maneuvers in fast current and good boat control in tight passages or around ledges are often required; large waves or "strainers" such as fallen trees, bridge pilings and undercut rocks may be present but are easily avoided. Strong eddies and powerful currents can be found, particularly on large-volume rivers. Scouting is advisable for inexperienced parties. Injuries while swimming are rare; self-rescue is usually easy but group assistance may be required to avoid a long swim.

### Class IV Advanced

Intense, powerful but predictable rapids requiring precise boat handling in turbulent water. Depending on the character of the river, it may feature large, unavoidable waves and holes or constricted passages demanding fast

maneuvers under pressure. A fast, reliable eddy turn may be needed to initiate maneuvers, scout rapids, or rest. Rapids may require "must" moves above dangerous rapids. Scouting is necessary the first time down. Risk of injury to swimmers is moderate to high, and water conditions may make self-rescue difficult. Group assistance for rescue is often essential but requires practiced skills. A strong Eskimo roll is highly recommended.

### Class V Expert

Extremely long, obstructed or very violent rapids, which expose a paddler to above-average danger. Drops may contain large unavoidable waves and holes or steep, congested chutes with complex, demanding routes. Rapids may continue for long distance between pools, demanding a high level of fitness. What eddies exist may be small, turbulent, or difficult to reach. At the high end of the rating scale, several of these factors may be combined. Scouting is mandatory but often difficult. Swims are dangerous, and rescue is difficult even for experts. A very reliable Eskimo roll, proper equipment, extensive experience, and practiced rescue skills are essential for survival.

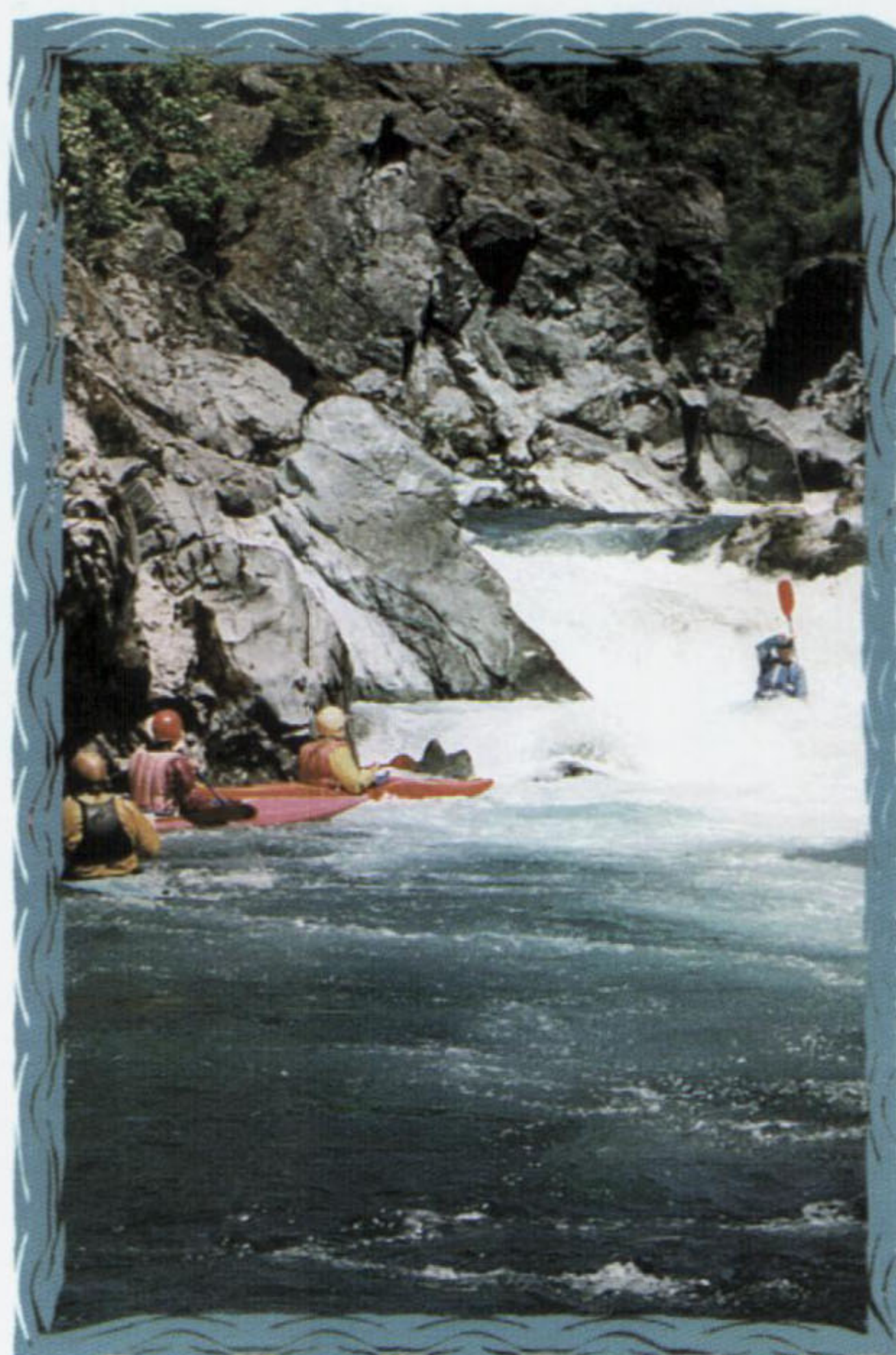
### Class VI Extreme

These runs exemplify extremes of difficulty, unpredictability, and danger. The consequences of errors are very severe and rescue may be impossible. For teams of experts only, at favorable water levels, after close inspection and taking of all precautions. This class does not represent drops thought to be unrunnable, but includes rapids that are only occasionally run.

A BOATING TRAIL GUIDE TO THE

WILD & SCENIC

SMITH  
RIVER



SMITH RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION AREA